

## Environmental Assessment Checklist

**Project Name: Philipsburg City Trails**

**Proposed Implementation Date: June 2017**

**Proponent: Anaconda Unit, Southwest Land Office, Montana DNRC and the town of Philipsburg, Montana**

**County: Granite**

### Type and Purpose of Action

#### Description of Proposed Action:

The town of Philipsburg, Montana has applied for a 10 year Land Use License to construct and maintain approximately 1 mile of walking trail on State owned classified grazing land adjacent to the town. The project is located immediately adjacent to the town of Philipsburg, MT (refer to Attachments A-1, project map and A-2, vicinity map) and includes the following Parcel:

Beneficiary	Legal Description	Total Acres	Affected Acres
Common Schools	PT SW4NW4	110	@ 2 acres

Proposed activities include: Construction and maintenance of approximately 1 mile of hiking trail on State owned land in Section 36, T7N, R14W. Prohibited activities associated with this license would be: no motorized use, no overnight camping, no commercial uses.

The lands involved in this proposed project are held in trust by the State of Montana. (Enabling Act of February 22, 1889; 1972 Montana Constitution, Article X, Section 11). The Board of Land Commissioners and the DNRC are required by law to administer these trust lands to produce the largest measure of reasonable and legitimate return over the long run for the beneficiary institutions (Section 77-1-202, MCA).

### Project Development

#### SCOPING:

- PUBLIC SCOPED:
  - Letters were sent to the lessee, Cameron Rasor, and adjacent owners on 12/19/2016. A legal notice was placed in the Philipsburg Mail on 12/29/2016; 1/5/2017; and 1/12/2017.
  - The Flint Creek Trails Association hosted a public meeting on 12/14, 2016 in Philipsburg, MT.
- AGENCIES SCOPED:
  - The USFS owns land adjacent (Pintler Ranger District) and was notified.

• **COMMENTS RECEIVED:**

- Comments in support were received from: Ed and Pat Siler; Heidi Beck-Heser; Paula Breithaupt; Philipsburg Chamber of Commerce; Granite County Medical Center; Granite High School; National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program (Gary Weiner); Jenne and David Pugh; Ed Brunsvold and Peggy Schlesinger; Rona McOmber; Maddy Mason.
- During the Flint Creek Trails Association public meeting on 12/14/ 2016, an adjacent landowner raised concerns with safety, noise, and impacts to wildlife and vegetation.

DNRC specialists were consulted, including: DNRC Wildlife Biologist, Garrett Schairer, DNRC Hydrologist, Jeff Collins, and DNRC Archaeologist, Patrick Rennie.

Internal and external issues and concerns were incorporated into project planning and design and will be implemented in associated contracts.

**OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:**

*(Conservation Easements, Army Corps of Engineers, road use permits, etc.)*

No other agencies are present.

**ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:**

**No-Action Alternative:** No trails would be built. The State owned land would still be leased for grazing.

**Action Alternative:** Develop approximately 1 mile of 6' wide, gravel surfaced walking trails.

## Impacts on the Physical Environment

Evaluation of the impacts on the No-Action and Action Alternatives including **direct, secondary, and cumulative** impacts on the Physical Environment.

**VEGETATION:**

**Vegetation Existing Conditions:** The northern 25 acres of the State owned land was previously leased for a gravel pit and was terminated in 2004. The southern portion is a wetland area. Spotted Knapweed occurs throughout much of the northern portion of the section and was sprayed in 2016. Weed management applications would be continued to be implemented by the lessee, Granite County, or DNRC.

Vegetation	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
<b><i>No-Action</i></b>														
Noxious Weeds	X				X				X					
Rare Plants	X				X				X					1
Vegetative	X				X				X					
<b><i>Action</i></b>														
Noxious Weeds		X				X				X				
Rare Plants	X				X				X					
Vegetative	X				X				X					



*Comments:* No rare plants have been identified.

*Vegetation Mitigations:* 1) Weed management would continue to be addressed through herbicide application by the lessee, Granite county, or Montana DNRC

## SOIL DISTURBANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY:

### Soil Disturbance and Productivity Existing Conditions:

Soil Disturbance and Productivity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
<b>No-Action</b>														
Physical Disturbance (Compaction and Displacement)	X				X				X					
Erosion	X				X				X					
Nutrient Cycling	X				X				X					
Slope Stability	X				X				X					
Soil Productivity	X				X				X					
<b>Action</b>														
Physical Disturbance (Compaction and Displacement)		X				X				X				1
Erosion	X				X				X					
Nutrient Cycling	X				X				X					
Slope Stability	X				X				X					
Soil Productivity	X				X				X					

*Comments:* 1) Approximately 1.21 acres of total land would be impacted from the trail (6' wide x 5,280' feet length/43,560 = 1.21 acres). No excavation would occur. Material would be brought in from off-site and compacted to develop the trails. Disturbed land would be re-seeded immediately.

## WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY:

**Water Quality and Quantity Existing Conditions:** The southern area of the State land is a wetland and has a high water table present throughout the year. No trail is being considered within this area at this time.

Water Quality & Quantity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
<b>No-Action</b>														
Water Quality	X				X				X					
Water Quantity	X				X				X					
<b>Action</b>														
Water Quality	X				X				X					

Water Quality & Quantity	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Water Quantity	X				X				X					

*Comments:* No change is expected under either alternative.

## FISHERIES:

**Fisheries Existing Conditions:** There are no streams or fisheries present in the project area.

## WILDLIFE:

**Wildlife Existing Conditions:** The project area contains open grasslands, with sizeable pockets of spotted knapweed. Existing disturbance to wildlife that likely limits wildlife use of the project area includes the county airport, Philipsburg City Park, Highway 1, and numerous human residences. No potential habitats exist for terrestrial threatened or endangered species in the project area. Habitats for sensitive species are limited in the project area. Sharp-tailed grouse prefer grasslands intermixed with tree and shrub grasslands. While grasslands are present in the project area, they lack suitability for sharp-tailed grouse and use would not be expected. Furthermore, no recent observations of sharp-tailed grouse have been documented in this portion of Granite County. Other Species of Concern potentially in the vicinity include great blue herons and long-billed curlews. The closest known great blue heron rookery is over 5 air miles away. The project area could provide some limited upland foraging habitats for great blue herons, but extensive use of the project area would not be expected. Long-billed curlews use mixed grass prairies, moist meadows, and open, short-statured grasslands; curlews have been documented 2 miles to the west of the project area. Use of the project area by long-billed curlews could occur. Limited big game summer range exists in the project area; big game winter range is not present in the project area.

### **No-Action:**

No further disturbance to wildlife would be anticipated. Any use of the project area by terrestrial wildlife would likely continue at similar levels as present. Generally, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects would be anticipated.

### **Action Alternative (see Wildlife table below):**

Human access could increase in the project area. Up to 2 miles of non-motorized access could further disturb wildlife in the project area. Elevated disturbance levels would likely cause some wildlife to alter their use of the area. Thus, minor disturbance effects to wildlife would be anticipated.

Wildlife	Impact								Can Impact be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct and Indirect				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Threatened and Endangered Species										
Grizzly bear (Ursus arctos) Habitat: Recovery areas, security from human activity	X				X					
Canada lynx (Felix lynx) Habitat: Subalpine fir habitat types.	X				X					

dense sapling, old forest, deep snow zone										
<b>Yellow-billed Cuckoo</b> ( <i>Coccyzus americanus</i> ) Habitat: Deciduous forest stands of 25 acres or more with dense understories and in Montana these areas are generally found in large river bottoms	X				X					
<b>Sensitive Species</b>										
<b>Bald eagle</b> ( <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i> ) Habitat: Late-successional forest within 1 mile of open water	X				X					
<b>Black-backed woodpecker</b> ( <i>Picoides arcticus</i> ) Habitat: Mature to old burned or beetle-infested forest	X				X					
<b>Coeur d'Alene salamander</b> ( <i>Plethodon idahoensis</i> ) Habitat: Waterfall spray zones, talus near cascading streams	X				X					
<b>Columbian sharp-tailed grouse</b> ( <i>Tympanuchus Phasianellus columbianus</i> ) Habitat: Grassland, shrubland, riparian, agriculture	X				X					
<b>Common loon</b> ( <i>Gavia immer</i> ) Habitat: Cold mountain lakes, nest in emergent vegetation	X				X					
<b>Fisher</b> ( <i>Martes pennanti</i> ) Habitat: Dense mature to old forest less than 6,000 feet in elevation and riparian	X				X					
<b>Flammulated owl</b> ( <i>Otus flammeolus</i> ) Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest	X				X					
<b>Gray Wolf</b> ( <i>Canis lupus</i> ) Habitat: Ample big game populations, security from human activities	X				X					
<b>Harlequin duck</b> ( <i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i> ) Habitat: White-water streams, boulder and cobble substrates	X				X					
<b>Northern bog lemming</b> ( <i>Synaptomys borealis</i> ) Habitat: Sphagnum meadows, bogs, fens with thick moss mats	X				X					
<b>Mountain plover</b> ( <i>Charadrius montanus</i> ) Habitat: short-grass prairie & prairie dog towns	X				X					
<b>Peregrine falcon</b>	X				X					

<i>(Falco peregrinus)</i> Habitat: Cliff features near open foraging areas and/or wetlands										
<b>Pileated woodpecker</b> <i>(Dryocopus pileatus)</i> Habitat: Late-successional ponderosa pine and larch-fir forest	X				X					
<b>Townsend's big-eared bat</b> <i>(Plecotus townsendii)</i> Habitat: Caves, caverns, old mines	X				X					
<b>Wolverine</b> <i>(Gulo gulo)</i> Habitat: Alpine tundra and high-elevation boreal and coniferous forests with deep persistent spring snow	X				X					
<b>Species of Concern</b>										
<b>Great blue herons</b>		X				X				W-1
<b>Long-billed curlew</b>		X				X				W-2
<b>Big Game Species</b>										
<b>Elk</b>		X				X				W-3
<b>Whitetail</b>		X				X				W-2
<b>Mule Deer</b>		X				X				W-2
<b>Bighorn Sheep</b>	X				X					
<b>Other</b>										

*Comments:*

W-1 Some displacement of foraging great blue herons could occur. No appreciable changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. Given the anticipated use levels of the project area, existing disturbance levels in the vicinity, and the availability of suitable foraging habitats in the larger landscape, negligible effects to great blue herons would be anticipated.

W-2 Proposed activities could disturb long-billed curlews that may be in the vicinity. No appreciable changes to existing habitats would be anticipated. Given the habitats present, existing levels of disturbance, and availability of habitats in the larger landscape, negligible effects would be anticipated.

W-3 Proposed trails could negligibly alter big game use of the area. Given the existing habitats, disturbance levels, and proximity to human developments, negligible effects to big game would be anticipated.

*Wildlife Mitigations:*

**AIR QUALITY:**

Air Quality	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
<b>No-Action</b>														
Smoke	X				X				X					
Dust	X				X				X					

Air Quality	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Action														
Smoke	X				X				X					
Dust	X				X				X					

*Comments:* There would be no measurable change with either alternative.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES / AESTHETICS / DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Will Alternative result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
<b>No-Action</b>														
Historical or Archaeological Sites	X				X				X					1
Aesthetics	X				X				X					
Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, or Energy	X				X				X					
<b>Action</b>														
Historical or Archaeological Sites	X				X				X					
Aesthetics	X				X				X					
Demands on Environmental Resources of Land, Water, or Energy	X				X				X					

*Comments:* 1) A Class I level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I portion of the review revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE. No cultural resources were identified and no additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during trail construction activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

**OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:** *List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.*

- No other documents are present.

## Impacts on the Human Population

Evaluation of the impacts on the proposed action including direct, secondary, and cumulative impacts on the Human Population.

Will Alternative result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
<b>No-Action</b>														
Health and Human Safety	X				X				X					
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production	X				X				X					1.
Quantity and Distribution of Employment	X				X				X					
Local Tax Base and Tax Revenues	X				X				X					
Demand for Government Services	X				X				X					
Access To and Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities	X				X				X					
Density and Distribution of population and housing	X				X				X					
Social Structures and Mores	X				X				X					
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	X				X				X					
<b>Action</b>														
Health and Human Safety		X				X				X				2.
Industrial, Commercial and Agricultural Activities and Production	X				X				X					
Quantity and Distribution of Employment	X				X				X					
Local Tax Base and Tax Revenues	X				X				X					
Demand for Government	X				X				X					



Will Alternative result in potential impacts to:	Impact												Can Impact Be Mitigated?	Comment Number
	Direct				Secondary				Cumulative					
	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High	No	Low	Mod	High		
Services														
Access To and Quality of Recreational and Wilderness Activities	X				X				X					
Density and Distribution of population and housing	X				X				X					
Social Structures and Mores	X				X				X					
Cultural Uniqueness and Diversity	X				X				X					

*Comments:* 1. Currently, the parcel is classified as grazing land and a renewal inspection was completed in 2015 for the parcel. The land is currently rated for 14 AUM's and the lessee currently grazes 2 horses on the lease. No grazing occurs on the northern 25 acres where the old gravel pit was due to lack of fencing near the city park easement and on the northern boundary along the road. The lessee has been engaged throughout the process and no impacts to his existing grazing management plan are anticipated with this license. The parcel has commercial leasing potential. It is adjacent the Highway and near the city of Phillipsburg. The parcel is adjacent to the sewer district and annexation is possible. The Granite County Growth Policy 2011 states that "the Town should develop the capacity to work with developers to annex their land into Town when appropriate." The Plan also states that "Economic Development is fundamental to the survival and future success of the community." If commercial leasing is viable, the project may require the trail to be rerouted in the future to comply with the design of a commercial lease opportunity that would generate a substantial higher amount of revenue to the Trust beneficiary.

2) A concern regarding Health and Human safety was raised by adjacent landowner. The primary concerns were: Nuisance dogs, theft, vandalism, noise, and trash. The public already has access to the park and much of the State land. Additionally, stipulations would be made in the land use license to provide: an informational kiosk outlining the rules for the trail, trash cans, and the county would have the ability to enforce a dog leash ordinance at their discretion. While these concerns are valid, they are not considered to be much above the existing conditions.

*Mitigations:*

**Locally Adopted Environmental Plans and Goals:** *List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.*

The parcel is un-zoned. The Granite County Growth Policy (2011) states "The town of Phillipsburg will continue to work with civic organizations to maintain and improve existing park and recreation activities within the community."

**Other Appropriate Social and Economic Circumstances:**

Costs, revenues and estimates of return are estimates intended for relative comparison of alternatives. They are not intended to be used as absolute estimates of return.

**No Action:** The No Action alternative would result in no additional revenue generation to the trust at this time.

**Action:** A land use license would generate \$500 annually for the Common School Trust Fund. Costs, revenues, and estimates of return are estimates intended for relative comparison of alternatives, they are not intended to be used as absolute estimates of return.

**Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects that are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur?**

No unacceptable risks or adverse effects are anticipated.

**Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant?**

No unacceptable risks or adverse effects are anticipated.

**Environmental Assessment Checklist Prepared By:**

**Name:** Brian Robbins  
**Title:** Unit Manager  
**Date:** January 20, 2017

**Finding**

**Alternative Selected**

The action alternative is the selected alternative.

**Significance of Potential Impacts**

No unacceptable impacts are anticipated with this project.

**Need for Further Environmental Analysis**

☐ EIS

☐ More Detailed EA

☒ No Further Analysis

**Environmental Assessment Checklist Approved By:**

**Name:** Liz Mullins  
**Title:** Southwestern Land Office Land Use Planner  
**Date:** 1/30/2017  
**Signature:** /s/ Liz Mullins

*Liz Mullins*



Attachment A- Maps



**Legend**

--- Trail Location (approx)

State Land

Philipsburg Trails Project  
T7N, R14W, Section 36



A-2: Timber Sale Vicinity Map

